



What Teachers and Other Adults Should Know About Bullying

Bullying has long been considered a "normal" part of growing up. It is still often shrugged off by adults who may not know how to handle it. However, those who had been bullied as a child or teenager remember the pain, humiliation, and terror that accompanies what was once thought of as "harmless child's play." Today, children face an ever-growing number of stresses with which they must cope. Often, the stress of peer rejection and bullying sends a child into a very real depression, causing them to live in constant fear that the bullying will recur and, in the saddest and most desperate situations, can lead a child to suicide. With potential results like these, it is crucial that adults prevent, intervene, and assume responsibility for stopping this behavior.

Since a lot of bullying occurs at school, teachers, principals, and other adults are responsible for intervening. Research surveys noted that teachers thought they intervened often or almost always in bullying. Children saw it in a much different way. Most surveyed children felt that teachers did nothing to stop the bullying. Children feared repercussions from telling the teacher what was happening and felt it did no good. The child being bullied was often too embarrassed by the humiliation to share this information. Many children also thought

that the teacher was not aware of these situations. This is not surprising since a teacher is often responsible for watching up to 100 children by him/herself on the playground. How can a teacher possibly be aware of every interaction among the children? Many teachers also commented that they were not sure exactly what should be done in cases of bullying. Some were hesitant to intervene because of the belief that the children should solve their own problems.

Remember that children often need to be taught HOW to solve problems. When bullies are allowed to continue their bullying, and the bullied are allowed to be tormented, both parties suffer. Many researchers believe that bullying creates a vicious cycle. The bully believes that aggression and power will get him what he wants, and the bullied child continues to be submissive and non-confrontational. Neither of these children develop advanced problem-solving skills and remain in the same situations into adulthood.

Teachers can help by talking about bullying in class, stopping it immediately when it happens, being aware of more subtle forms of bullying (such as relational bullying, in which a student is excluded socially), and encouraging students to report when an incident occurs. Students and school personnel should be made aware that bullying will not be tolerated, and that this behavior has clearly defined

consequences. School administrators should develop a list of procedures to be followed when a bullying incident occurs.

Children must understand the difference between "tattling" or "ratting someone out" and reporting an incident. Tattling or ratting is when a child tells another person to get in trouble, and reporting is used to get someone out of trouble. Many children fear being known as a "tattletale" and suffer silently because of this. Also, students should be able to report to school personnel with the assurance that their statements and identities will be kept confidential.

It is time to reject the perception that bullying is "just a part of growing up." If adults don't tolerate abuse, humiliation, or other forms of victimization in the workplace, then a child should not be expected to endure hitting, kicking, ridicule, or isolation at school. It is the ultimate responsibility of adults to see that every child has a safe, secure environment in which to learn and play.

Bullying can be addressed and prevented by clearly defining bullying behaviors and their consequences, teaching problem-solving skills, and encouraging empathy and acceptance of differences.